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FM AMEMBASSY VIENNA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1762

OSD WASHDC PRIORITY

WHITEHOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS VIENNA 003836

DEPT FOR EUR/AGS, INR/EU, AND EUR/PPD FOR LISBETH KEEFE

OSD FOR COMMANDER CHAFFEE

WHITEHOUSE FOR NSC/WEUROPE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KPAO, AU, OPRC

SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: DECEMBER 09, 2005

Increased Acceptance for Extended Opening Hours

1. The issue now lies with the Constitutional Court, reports centrist daily "Die Presse" in reference to the ongoing discussion about extended opening hours in Austria. The daily refers to a recent opinion poll where two thirds of Austrians have a positive attitude towards more flexible opening hours that allow for shopping also on Sunday. The necessity for so-called "tourist zones" where the shops are allowed to stay open to satisfy the tourists' demands is recognized by 75% of Austrians, according to the daily.

Finally, Money for Nazi Victims

2. All Austrian media report that Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel met with US President George Bush at the White House yesterday, ahead of the Austrian EU Presidency beginning in January 2006. After their meeting, Schuessel

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said in discussions of alleged CIA activities in Europe he was given assurances that the US respects international law and the convention against torture. Mass-circulation daily "Kurier" quotes Bush in English as emphasizing that "we don't torture people." The US President also ruled out the possibility that US airplanes might have crossed European airspace without permission of the respective governments. All Austrian media also report that Bush also personally introduced Schuessel to US Ambassador Designate Susan McCaw. And, like all major Austrian media, semi-official daily "Wiener Zeitung" reports on its front page that Schuessel also announced compensation payments by Austria to victims of the Nazi regime could now begin as the last lawsuit in US courts has been dropped.

----- Media Reactions to Schuessel's US Visit -----

3. Austrian television news broadcast "Zeit im Bild 1" reports on the visit of Chancellor Schuessel in Washington and his meeting with US President George W. Bush on (12/08): "This visit comes at a difficult time in the European-American relations. However, Bush's manner was jovial when he greeted Schuessel. Both sides wanted to stress the common ground that has connected the old and the new world for decades. However, the controversy around CIA secret prisons is threatening to call into question the efforts to end the quarrel around the Iraq war. (.) Schuessel was pleased at the latest American clarifications on the issue of human rights. (.) As future President of the EU Council, Chancellor Schuessel wants to make sure that the transatlantic relations will take a turn for the better."

----- Media Reactions to Impending Arrival of New US Ambassador ----- to Austria -----

4. Foreign affairs writer for centrist daily "Die Presse" Burkhard Bischof analyzes the difficulties the new Ambassador will face: "Susan McCaw will not have an easy job. When the new American Ambassador arrives at Schwechat Airport on Friday morning, she will find a considerable mess in Austria - caused by the politics of George W. Bush's administration over the past five years. No, this is not about the Austrian-American relations on the highest official level. They are hardly in a worse state today than they were in former times. (.) The problem is on the lower

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level, at the base so to speak: The number of people who are anti-American and the number of America critics have grown exorbitantly in Austria - and elsewhere - over the past five years. Those who openly state a preference for the United States and its government these days, find themselves automatically in a minority position. It will be the main task of the new Ambassador to correct this negative image of America. It will turn out to be Susan McCaw's mammoth task."

UN Ombudsman: US Covert Prison in Kosovo

5. According to UN ombudsman Marek Nowicki, the US military is running a covert prison facility at its Camp Bondsteel base in Kosovo, ORF radio and online news reports. Sourcing German daily "Berliner Zeitung," ORF online quotes Nowicki as claiming "there can be no doubt that a prison has existed in Camp Bondsteel for years, subject to neither legal nor any kind of external civilian control. We have no idea what's going on there." He visited the Bondsteel base twice -- in 2000 and 2001 -- and described the facility as "a jail that resembles what we've seen in pictures of Guantanamo." Nowicki, a lawyer from Poland, has been the UN ombudsman for Kosovo for six years.

Iranian President Denies Holocaust

6. There is international condemnation of statements from Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who questioned whether the Holocaust took place and said Israel should be moved to Europe. He made the remarks at a summit in Mecca convened to condemn terrorism and extremism. According to ORF radio, Ahmadinejad said he does not accept the accusation that Hitler had had millions of Jews killed, and suggested those European countries which claim Jews were killed in World War II, particularly Germany and Austria, provide the people of Israel with part of their territory so they could be relocated. Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel, quoted by ORF online news, described the remarks as "outrageously misguided, which I want to repudiate in the sharpest manner." Austria's Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik has meanwhile summoned the Iranian Ambassador in Austria to the Foreign Ministry, says ORF radio.

War Crimes: Croatian General Gotovina Captured

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7. All Austrian media report on the capturing of Ante Gotovina, former Croatian general, who is accused by the UN International Tribunal of having committed war crimes. When charges were leveled against him in 2001, Gotovina disappeared and was only now discovered on the Spanish island of Tenerife. For a long time, Gotovina was even considered a potential obstacle for a quick Croatian ascension to EU membership status, writes independent daily "Der Standard." The EU Commission accordingly welcomed the capture of Gotovina. In Croatia, however, reactions were mixed since Gotovina still has supporters who consider him a "hero" and a "liberator," reports mass circulation provincial daily "Kleine Zeitung" in reference to Gotovina's role in the recapturing of the Krajina from the Serbs. Whereas Croatia's Prime Minister Ivo Sanader and the leader of the Social Democrats Ivica Racan welcomed the capture of Gotovina, the leader of the right-wing party HSP, Anto Djapic, called the capture a "heavy blow" for Croatia. However, in view of Gotovina's standing as popular hero in parts of the country, even the Croatian government is relieved that he was eventually captured in Spain and that they will not be the ones who have to initiate his extradition to the tribunal in The Hague, comments the foreign affairs writer for the daily, Michael Jungwirth. Kilner

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